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The Impact of Fathers' Absence on African American Adolescents' Gender Role Development

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Gender role development was assessed in 52 father-absent and 54 father-present African American adolescents. Father-present boys, especially those from lower-income backgrounds, had higher perceptions of their masculinity than did father-absent boys. Lower income father-absent girls perceived themselves to be higher in masculinity than did all other girls. Consequently, father-present adolescents tended to have more traditional gender role orientations than did those in father-absent homes. It is argued that mothers' and fathers' different socializing strategies balance out in two-parent homes. However, in father-absent homes, mothers' tendency to rely on and pressure their daughters fosters relatively more masculine girls, whereas a lack of father socialization fosters less masculine boys. Implications for theory and future research are also discussed.

KEY WORDS: gender role development; father's absence; African American adolescents.

Gender role development is a well-studied area of psychological research that refers to schemas or beliefs about one's masculinity and femininity, the feelings associated with those attributes, and one's perceptions of one's similarity to others of one's gender (Egan & Perry, 2001). Although a great deal is known about the development and consequences of gender role orientations (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Marsh & Byrne, 1991; Ruble & Martin, 2000), the effects of different cultures and diverse family environments are highly debated (Harris, 1996; Hilton & Haldeman, 1991; Hofferth & Anderson, 2003; Hunter & Davis, 1992; Ruble & Martin, 2000).

For example, there is great debate about the effects on gender role development of living in a fatherless home (Beaty, 1995; Leve & Fagot, 1997; Stevens, Golombok, Beveridge, & Study Team ALSPAC, 2002; Stevenson & Black, 1988). Many have argued that fathers are important to the psychosocial development of children and adolescents (Adelson, 1980; Amato, 1991; Beaty, 1995; Hilton & Desrochers, 2002; Mandara & Murray, 2000), whereas others have argued that the importance of fathers to child development is questionable at best (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999; Stevens et al., 2002). Given that a large percentage of African American children are now reared in predominately single mother-headed households (Fields, 2003; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995), the differences between father-absent and father-present African American adolescents are at the center of this debate (Mandara & Murray, 2000). It is surprising that very few researchers have specifically examined gender role differences between father-absent and father-present African American adolescents. The purpose of the present study was to fill this void and to explore the effects of father's absence on the current and ideal gender role development of African American adolescents.

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Fathers' Influence on Gender Role Development

As the structure of American families began to change, several researchers examined the effects

of paternal absence on both masculine and feminine gender role development. The general trend suggested that boys who were not primarily raised with their fathers were more passive and exhibited more feminine and fewer masculine traits, such as rough and competitive play, than did father-present boys. However, no effects appeared for girls (Adelson, 1980; Beaty, 1995; Hetherington, 1966, 1972; Kodandaram, 1991; Stephens & Day, 1979; Stevenson & Black, 1988). For instance, an early study (Hetherington, 1966) showed that African American and European American boys whose fathers were not living with them by the age of 5 years were less aggressive, participated less in physical games, and generally had fewer gender-typed traits than did father-present boys. Other researchers have found no gender-typed differences between father-absent and father-present girls (Hetherington, 1972) or between girls living with their fathers only, with their mothers only, or in two-parent homes (Stephens & Day, 1979). A meta-analysis of several early studies confirmed this and showed that father-present boys were more stereotypically gender-typed (i.e., masculine) than were father-absent boys; there were no such differences for girls (Stevenson & Black, 1988).

More recent studies have shown similar trends. In a study of 40 boys who had been arrested for various delinquent acts, the 20 father-absent boys were significantly higher on femininity than were the 20 father-present boys (Kodandaram, 1991). Research even suggests that the rough and tumble play, stricter discipline, and focus on achievement and overcoming obstacles that is typical of fathers' relationship with sons (Parke, 1996) may produce an increase in boys' self-confidence in their masculinity, and it may actually impact the boys' hormone levels. For instance, a study of the hormone profiles of men and women in a rural Caribbean village showed that adult men who had experienced father absence during childhood exhibited significantly lower levels of testosterone than did men who were raised with a father (Flinn, Quinlan, Decker, Turner, & England, 1996). Because testosterone influences observable differences in characteristics such as physical strength, growth of facial hair, voice changes, and other signs of physical and behavioral masculinization (Schaal, Tremblay, Soussignan, & Susman, 1996), boys' levels of testosterone may influence self-perceptions of masculinity.

Although it is not clear if the hormonal differences observed in men generalize to differences in boys, other anecdotal evidence suggests that this may be the case. Beaty (1995) conducted a study in which 40 junior high school boys rated each other on 15 words associated with masculinity. Results showed that the father-absent boys rated the father-present boys as significantly more masculine than the father-present boys rated the father-absent boys. Another study showed that feminine boys' fathers had spent less time with them in infancy than had the fathers of masculine boys (Green, Williams, & Goodman, 1985). Therefore, on average, father-present boys likely had more traits associated with masculinity than did father-absent boys.

These findings have been interpreted in many ways (see Ruble and Martin, 2000, for a review), but the main explanation is that boys are more affected than girls are by their fathers' absence because father-absent boys do not have a prominent role model of masculinity, whereas father-absent girls do have a prominent role model of femininity (Beaty, 1995; Ruble & Martin, 2000). Boys have other men as role models, but they are usually not as close or important as a parent would be (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003). Furthermore, mothers, and especially fathers, differentially treat and talk to their girls and boys (Jackson, 1993; Jenkins & Guidubaldi, 1997; Leaper, Anderson, & Sanders, 1998; Leve & Fagot, 1997; Siegal, 1987; Starrels, 1994). Mothers are also more likely to encourage androgyny in their children, whereas fathers are more likely to stress masculine traits in their sons and feminine traits in their daughters (Leve & Fagot, 1997; Parke, 1996; Popenoe, 1996; Price-Bonham & Skeen, 1982: Starrels, 1994). However, there are several limitations in the family structure and gender role development literature.

Conceptual and Methodological Issues

One unresolved issue is the effect of race and culture on gender role development. For instance, some have argued that gender role socialization in African American homes is less gender-typed than is the case in European American homes (Harris, 1996; Hunter & Davis, 1992; Reid & Trotter, 1993). Thus, African American women are more likely to be masculine or androgynous than are European American women (Binion, 1990; De Leon, 1993; Harris, 1996). Also, because of the traditional extended nature of African American families (Kamo, 2000; Scott & Black, 1989), they may be able to depend on other men to fulfill the father's traditional role in gender role development (McAdoo & McAdoo,

2002). Furthermore, given that single mothers have headed a significant percentage of African American families since the 1960s (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995), single African American mothers may have learned to supplement the role of fathers in the lives of their children. Therefore, it is possible that father's absence does not have the same effect on African Americans as it is does on other populations.

The cultural and socio-economic context of African American fathers also greatly impacts their ability and decision to be actively involved in the socialization of their children (Bowman & Forman, 1997; Johnson, 1998, 2001; Lawson & Thompson, 1999; McAdoo & McAdoo, 2002). According to Bowman and Sanders (1998), "As employment problems among Black fathers shifted from underemployment in menial jobs to joblessness, corresponding increases have occurred in family provider role problems, unmarried teenage pregnancies, mother-headed households, and the feminization of family poverty in Black communities" (pp. 1–2). In support of this, data from the National Survey of Black Americans show that married fathers have higher personal income than formerly married fathers, who in turn have higher personal income than never married fathers (Bowman & Forman, 1997). Furthermore, fathers' marital status and provider role problems impact their ability to be actively involved in the day-to-day socialization of their children (Bowman & Sanders, 1998; Johnson, 2001; McAdoo & McAdoo, 2002).

Many researchers have even argued that the actual physical presence of the father is not as important as the added financial resources he brings to the family (McLanahan, 1985; McLeod, Kruttschnitt, & Dornfeld, 1994). This implies that the father's primary role is a financial provider, and, if the father's income producing role is somehow supplemented, then the children living in the average father-absent family will be the same as those living in the average father-present family. Whether this family income perspective is accurate or not is debatable (Mandara & Murray, 2000). However, it is clear that socio-economic status may account for many of the differences between father-absent and father-present families. Therefore, the effects of family income were assessed in the current study.

Another limitation of most previous father absence and gender role studies is the lack of family functioning measures (Scott & Black, 1989; Stevens et al., 2002). The most consistent finding in family research is that the quality of family functioning is the main predictor of child and adolescent development for both genders (Coley, 1998; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Mandara, 2003; Mandara & Murray, 2002). Therefore, if fathers do influence their adolescents' psychosocial development, it is likely that they do so by impacting the dynamics of the family environment. Several authors have made this argument (Florsheim, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 1998; Heiss, 1996; Mandara & Murray, 2000; McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). This implies that if a single mother can facilitate a family environment that is similar to that of a traditional father-present environment, then she can mitigate any negative consequences of her children not having the day-to-day presence of a father. Thus, her adolescents should have the same psychosocial development, including gender role orientations, as those in father-present homes. To assess this, the effects of three dimensions of family functioning on gender role development were examined in the present study.

There are also some methodological concerns with the father absence and gender role development literatures. One issue is the difference between how participants perceive themselves as behaving and how they would like to behave. Although studies show the effects of father's absence on one's current gender role development, researchers have not examined how participants would like to be or the discrepancy between these behaviors. The ideal represents a desired state or goal that a person may wish to achieve. The discrepancy between ideal and current behaviors implies unhappiness with current levels that cannot be uncovered only by assessing current behavior (Ruvolo & Veroff, 1997; Waugh, 2001). Therefore, to make more detailed statements about the effects of fathers' absence on gender role development, adolescents in the present study were asked what their current gender role orientations are and what their ideal orientations are.

Another methodological issue with previous studies is that individuals' personal definitions of masculinity or femininity have not been taken into consideration. Because most previous researchers used standardized measures of gender role development, whether people consider themselves to be masculine or feminine (i.e., whatever it means to them) may be lost. Although standardized measures have many advantages (Nunnaly & Bernstein, 1994), they also have some disadvantages. It is possible that most emotionally stable women are high on the masculinity and low on the femininity scales of Bem's Sex Role Inventory (thus being considered

masculine by standardized measures), but they may consider themselves to be feminine. For instance, a recent study of elementary and middle school children showed that feeling like a typical member of one's gender was positively correlated with psychosocial adjustment for girls and boys (Egan & Perry, 2001). However, researchers who have used standardized measures have found null or negative correlations between femininity and adjustment for girls (Barrett & White, 2002; Whitley, 1985). This may be because their perceptions of what femininity is do not conform to the stereotypes that underlie the development of standardized measures. In the current study, Q-sort methodology was used to ask adolescents how "manly, masculine" and "ladylike, feminine" they believe they are now and how they would ideally like to be.

In an earlier study of the current sample, it was found that father-present boys had significantly higher levels of self-esteem than did father-absent boys, even when family functioning and family income were statistically controlled (Mandara & Murray, 2000). Because self-esteem is positively related to standardized measures of masculinity in both male and female adolescents (Adams & Sherer, 1985; Burnett, Anderson, & Heppner, 1995; Long, 1989; Marsh, Antill, & Cunningham, 1987; Ruble & Martin, 2000; Whitley, 1985), it is highly likely that self-esteem mediates the relationship between father's absence and gender role development. This may be particularly true for adolescent boys because their perceptions of masculinity are so intertwined with their self-esteem (Berrenberg & Deyle, 1989; Burnett et al., 1995; Long, 1989; Whitley, 1985). Therefore, we also examined the effects of self-esteem on gender role development in the current study.

Theory and Hypotheses

Given the literature reviewed above, it was expected that the old saying in African American communities that "Mothers love their sons and raise their daughters" would hold true for the average, or most typical, African American family. This theory argues that many African American mothers have different discipline styles and generally different parental goals and expectations for their sons and daughters (Hill & Zimmerman, 1995; Mandara & Murray, 2000; McLoyd, 1990; Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996; Staples & Boulin-Johnson, 1993). Because African American mothers "love" their sons, they tend to be more permissive and less demanding of their sons. However, they spend more time guiding and pressuring their daughters to be independent and achievement-oriented. For instance, a qualitative study of 35 low-income African American mothers who have a child suffering from sickle cell disease showed that mothers of sons were more involved, more protective, and generally more worried about their children's ability to deal with the disease than were mothers of daughters with the disease (Hill & Zimmerman, 1995). Daughters were given more freedom, encouraged to go on with their lives as if they did not have the disease, and trusted to care for themselves more than the sons were. The authors concluded that mothers saw their girls as valiant (i.e., strong and independent) and their boys as vulnerable (i.e., weak and dependent).

In contrast, African American fathers tend to be more controlling, guiding, achievement-oriented, physically rougher, and more involved in the day-to-day activities of their boys than their girls. They are also more permissive and less demanding of their girls (Leaper et al., 1998; Leve & Fagot, 1997). For instance, Wilson, Burlew, and Banks (1992) found differences in children's and mothers' perceptions regarding African American fathers' socializing strategies of their girls and boys. Specifically, mothers, grandmothers, daughters, and sons perceived the fathers of sons as using more controlling, demanding, and supporting parental behaviors than did fathers of daughters. Fathers of sons were also perceived as more involved with their children than were fathers of daughters.

Therefore, in the average two-parent African American household, where the parents have relatively equal influence on their children, the mothers' tendency to raise their daughters and love their sons would be balanced by the fathers' tendency to do the opposite. In this case, children of both genders receive a balanced amount of control and warmth (i.e., raising and loving), even though the actions are coming primarily from different sources. However, in the average single-parent home, this balance may become upset, and the family environment can become skewed in the direction of the single parent.

Given this balance theory, several hypotheses were deduced. First, because father-absent boys are missing the traditional father socialization that stresses masculinization, it was expected that they would have lower perceptions of both their current and ideal masculinity and higher perceptions of

both their current and ideal femininity than would father-present boys. Given the permissive socialization and feminization fathers try to promote in their girls, it was also expected that father-present girls would perceive themselves to be higher in both current and ideal femininity than would father-absent girls. Because father-present boys were expected to be more masculine and less feminine than father-absent boys, and father-present girls were expected to be more feminine than father-absent girls, another hypothesis was that father-present adolescents would tend to be more traditional in their gender role development than father-absent adolescents.

METHOD

Participants

One hundred and six 15-year-old African American adolescents (53% girls; 47% boys) from various high schools in southern California and their parents participated in the study. Seven of the parents were fathers. Fifty percent of the parents were married. The mothers of three of the single-parent children were actually the children's grandmothers. Consequently, there were 25 father-absent boys, 25 father-present boys, 27 father-absent girls, and 29 father-present girls. According to the parents of the adolescents, most of the father-absent adolescents never or rarely spent time with their fathers, whereas most of the father-present adolescents did spend time with their fathers. Only 10 of the father-absent adolescents lived with their mother and her live-in boyfriend. Nineteen of the father-present adolescents lived with their mother and stepfather. No single fathers were in the sample. The parents' ages ranged from 30 to 52 years ($M = 36.9, SD = 5.2$). The average annual household income for the sample was \$27,500 ($SD \cong \$12,000$). Approximately 20% of the sample earned less than \$20,000, and 35% earned more than \$35,000 annually. The SES of the sample reflects the general trends for African American families in southern California. The participants are from a larger study of African American families and child outcomes.

Procedure

Participant recruitment was accomplished from lists of names and addresses of African American students provided by four school districts in southern California. District officials generated a list of students who met the specified criteria and forwarded a request and permission form to their parents. The exact number of African Americans in each district varied greatly. The form included a description of the study and a self-addressed, stamped reply form. A list of participants was generated using the returned reply forms. Those African American parents born in the United States who had a child aged 6, 9, 12, or 15 years were invited to participate. Only one child per family participated. Due to budget limitations, only 600 names (150 within each age group) were randomly selected from the larger list of names. For the current study, only the 15-year-old students were used because the others were not assessed on gender role development.

Assessments were conducted at a time and place convenient to the participants (e.g., school, home, or a southern California university). Assessments were accomplished by having participants complete a questionnaire and then the Q-sort described below. Each assessment took about 2 h to complete. A team of African American undergraduate and graduate research assistants conducted the assessments. Parental permission was obtained for each student prior to participation; each student received \$10, and the parents received \$25 for a single 2-h session. Information regarding the perceptions of gender role development, self-esteem, and family functioning was obtained from the adolescents; all other demographic information was obtained from their parents.

Instruments

Demographic Information

The following demographic information was obtained from parents and their adolescents: age and sex of participant, family structure (married, divorced, or never married), and family annual income. Because of the sample size and because only 11 of the 52 father-absent adolescents' parents were never married, according to the parents (three boys and eight girls), divorced and never married groups were collapsed into one group (i.e., father-absent). Furthermore, the never married and divorced adolescents did not significantly differ on any of the variables in the study. The structure of four families was determined from their responses at later waves of the larger study.

Family Functioning

The Family Environment Scale (FES) (Moos & Moos, 1986) was used to measure family functioning. The FES is a 90-item true or false test that assesses perceptions of 10 areas of family functioning. The subscales were derived from three family environment dimensions. The *relationship dimension* consists of the cohesion ($\alpha = .60$), conflict ($\alpha = .65$), and expressiveness ($\alpha = .40$) subscales. This dimension assesses perceptions of the degree to which family members express concern and commitment to the family, express anger and engage in conflictive encounters, and express their other feelings. The *personal growth dimension* measures the emphasis placed on independence-autonomy ($\alpha = .40$), achievement ($\alpha = .60$), intellectual-cultural activities ($\alpha = .63$), active recreational activities ($\alpha = .63$), and moral-religious ($\alpha = .52$) areas of family functioning. The *systems maintenance dimension* consists of the last two subscales: family organization ($\alpha = .54$) and control ($\alpha = .36$). This dimension assesses the general organization and structuring of activities within the family and the extent to which family members exert control over each other (see Moos & Moos, 1986, for more detailed psychometric properties in other samples).

Self-esteem

The Multi-Dimensional Self-Esteem Inventory (MDSEI) (O'Brien & Epstein, 1988) was used as the measure of self-esteem. The MDSEI is a 116-item instrument that assesses global ($\alpha = .87$) and seven domain specific aspects of self-esteem. Adolescent participants indicated on a 5-point Likert-type scale how accurately 61 of the items describe them and how often they experience the thoughts and feelings described in 55 of the items. The seven domain-specific subscales are feelings of competence ($\alpha = .74$), personal power ($\alpha = .76$), lovability ($\alpha = .71$), likeability ($\alpha = .69$), self-control ($\alpha = .74$), moral self-approval ($\alpha = .75$), and body functioning ($\alpha = .76$). For the current study, a composite was created from the unweighted average of each subscale, which was used as the measure of self-esteem.

Gender Role Development

To measure gender role development, the participants described themselves using an Adjective Q-Sort adapted from the Self-Descriptive Q-Set (Block & Block, 1980) and modified to function more appropriately in samples of African American adolescents and children by Aguilar, Kaiser, Murray, and Ozer (1998). See Aguilar et al. (1998) for more specific details. The procedure began with the adolescents placing 43 cards into 1 of 7 categories from "most descriptive" to "least descriptive." Each card contained a personality-related adjective. Following typical Q-sort methodology, the participants were instructed only to have a maximum of seven cards in the middle or "neutral" category, and a maximum of six cards in each of the remaining categories. They were given a sheet that outlined the distribution they needed to follow. The procedure is somewhat iterative, as the participants can reshuffle the order until they are comfortable with the placement of each card. This procedure forces a quasi-normal distribution on the items. One card read "Manly, masculine," and another read "Ladylike, feminine." This methodology was then repeated, but the participants were instructed to sort the cards according to their ideal. Therefore, each adolescent had a score between 1 (least descriptive) and 7 (most descriptive) on each of the four variables (i.e., current masculinity, current femininity, ideal masculinity, and ideal femininity).

RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of the study variables are presented in Table I for boys and in Table II for girls. As can be seen in Table I, all of the intercorrelations among the gender role variables are in the expected directions for boys, except that current femininity was not linearly related to either masculinity variable. For the girls, the pattern of results was somewhat different (see Table II). As expected, current femininity was negatively related to current masculinity, and ideal femininity was negatively related to ideal masculinity. However, the current and ideal perceptions were not correlated.

To test the major hypotheses of the study, a 2×2 (marital status $\times$ gender) multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted with income, self-esteem, and the three family functioning variables serving as covariates and current and ideal masculinity and femininity serving as the dependent variables. The results revealed that the multivariate effects of income, self-esteem, the three

Table I. Descriptive Statistics for Boys' Gender Role Development Variables

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Current femininity	1.46	1.13	1								
2. Current masculinity	4.66	1.72	−.04	1							
3. Ideal femininity	1.66	1.24	.64**	−.24	1						
4. Ideal masculinity	5.18	1.60	−.06	.26	−.33*	1					
5. Family income	5.69	2.83	−.09	−.04	−.02	.42**	1				
6. Family relations	1.57	.15	.17	.12	.07	.12	.13	1			
7. Family growth	1.65	.11	.04	.28	−.17	.33*	.22	.33*	1		
8. Family systems	1.66	.16	.00	.05	−.10	.11	.23	.05	.27	1	
9. Self-esteem	3.47	.39	−.05	.18	−.17	.25	.21	.20	.5**	.46**	1

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

family functioning dimensions, and marital status were not significant, but gender had a significant effect, Wilks' Lambda = .18, $F(4, 92) = 107$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .82$. However, the multivariate interaction between marital status and gender was significant, Wilks' Lambda = .87, $F(4, 92) = 3.6$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .14$.

An examination of the univariate effects revealed that gender predicted each of the dependent variables as expected: current femininity $\eta^2 = .5$, current masculinity $\eta^2 = .4$, ideal femininity $\eta^2 = .7$, and ideal masculinity $\eta^2 = .7$; but none of the other variables affected any of the dependent variables. As expected, there were also significant univariate interactions between marital status and sex on perceptions of current masculinity, $F(1, 95) = 8.16$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$, ideal masculinity, $F(1, 95) = 8.21$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$, and a marginal interaction for ideal femininity, $F(1, 95) = 2.4$, $p = .10$, $\eta^2 = .02$. These interactions are important findings given that several critical variables were statistically controlled and the sample size is not very large. To assess the hypotheses more specifically, simple effects tests for each significant interaction were conducted by first performing analyses for each gender separately, then for each level of marital status.

Effects of Fathers' Absence on Boys' Gender Role Development

It was expected that father-absent boys would have lower current and ideal masculinity and higher current and ideal femininity than would father-present boys. This was partially supported. Results indicated that even when we controlled for the other variables, boys from father-absent homes had lower perceptions of their current masculinity than did boys in father-present homes (see Table III). The mean difference for ideal masculinity was even greater, but when the controls were added, this difference was not significant. However, none of the family functioning variables had significant unique effects on any of the variables. Counter to our predictions, boys did not differ on their current or ideal femininity.

An interesting result was that family income had a significant negative effect on perceptions of current masculinity, $F(1, 42) = 3.95$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .090$, $\beta = -.38$, which indicates that the lower the income, the higher their perceptions of current masculinity. As can be seen in Fig. 1, this result shows that father-present boys with family incomes below the median had the highest perceptions of their masculinity,

Table II. Descriptive Statistics for Girls' Gender Role Development Variables

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Current femininity	4.71	1.76	1								
2. Current masculinity	2.03	1.64	−.40**	1							
3. Ideal femininity	5.52	1.42	−.11	−.06	1						
4. Ideal masculinity	1.81	1.25	−.08	−.05	−.60**	1					
5. Family income	6.36	3.27	.22	−.22	.02	−.10	1				
6. Family relations	1.59	.18	.26*	−.37**	−.08	−.02	.16	1			
7. Family growth	1.64	.13	.19	−.24	−.10	−.18	.19	.39**	1		
8. Family systems	1.64	.14	.32*	−.07	.13	−.29*	−.23	.31*	.40**	1	
9. Self-esteem	3.57	.43	.24*	−.15	−.17	.04	.28*	.50**	.40**	.03	1

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

Table III. Boys' Gender Role Development by Family Structure Before and After We Controlled for Self-esteem, Family Income, Family Relationships, Family Growth, and Family Systems

	Family structure			
Gender role	Father-present ($n = 25$)	Father-absent ($n = 25$)	F (1,48)	η
Raw scores				
Current femininity	1.44 (1.3)	1.48 (0.9)	0.02	.02
Current masculinity	5.12 (1.7)	4.20 (1.6)	3.80*	.27
Ideal femininity	1.52 (1.2)	1.80 (1.3)	0.65	.11
Ideal masculinity	5.72 (1.2)	4.64 (1.8)	6.32*	.34
Adjusted scores				
Current femininity	1.46	1.46	0.00	.00
Current masculinity	5.36	3.96	5.83*	.35
Ideal femininity	1.61	1.71	0.48	.10
Ideal masculinity	5.48	4.88	1.36	.17

Note. The means are adjusted for the covariates. Standard deviations are in parentheses and are given for raw scores only.
*$p < .05$.

whereas above median income father-absent boys perceived themselves as lower in masculinity.

Effects of Fathers' Absence on Girls' Gender Role Development

The same analyses were conducted for the girls (see Table IV). It was also expected that the groups would differ on current and ideal femininity. This was partially supported as well. Father-absent girls had lower levels of ideal femininity before and after the controls were added. It is interesting that the father-absent girls had higher self-perceptions of current masculinity than did the father-present girls, even after the other variables were controlled. Girls did not significantly differ on ideal masculinity before or after the controls. Other results showed that family income, $F(1, 48) = 5.06, p < .05, \eta^2 = .10, \beta = .35$, and family systems, $F(1, 48) = 8.70, p < .01, \eta^2 = .15, \beta = .52$, had significantly positive effects on girls' perceptions of their femininity.

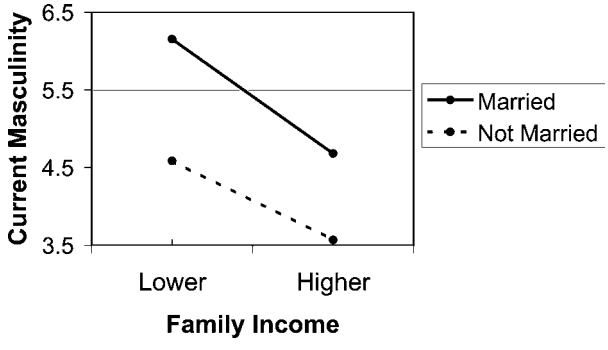

Fig. 1. Effects of family structure and family income on boys' current masculinity.

A significant interaction between fathers' absence and family income on current masculinity also emerged, $F(1, 47) = 5.9, p = .02, \eta^2 = .11$. As Fig. 2 shows, father-absent girls from families with below the median income were much higher in levels of current masculinity than were either of the above the median income groups, $F(1, 27) = 4.3, p = .05, \eta^2 = .17$, or the below the median income father-present girls, $F(1, 15) = 8.13, p = .01, \eta^2 = .36$.

Gender Role Differences Within Father-Present and Father-Absent Homes

Another hypothesis of the study was that the gender differences within father-present homes would be greater than those in father-absent homes. As expected, girls and boys differed significantly on all of the gender role variables in father-present homes, $r = .75, .81, .89, .91$, and in father-absent homes, $r = .69, .39, .77, .62$. To see if the difference in gender role development between girls and boys in father-present homes was greater than the difference between girls and boys in father-absent homes, independent correlation z-tests were computed on the effect sizes (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Results showed that there was a significantly greater difference between girls and boys in father-present homes than between girls and boys in father-absent homes on current masculinity ($p < .01$), ideal masculinity ($p < .01$), and ideal femininity ($p < .05$). As predicted, these results imply that girls and boys in father-absent homes have more similar gender roles

Table IV. Girls' Gender Role Development by Family Structure Before and After We Controlled for Self-esteem, Family Income, Family Relationships, Family Growth, and Family Systems

	Family structure			
Gender role	Father-present ($n = 29$)	Father-absent ($n = 27$)	F (1,54)	η
Raw scores				
Current femininity	4.66 (1.5)	4.52 (2.0)	0.08	.00
Current masculinity	1.52 (0.8)	2.63 (2.2)	6.70*	.33
Ideal femininity	5.93 (1.2)	5.17 (1.6)	4.31*	.26
Ideal masculinity	1.54 (0.7)	2.03 (1.6)	2.32	.20
Adjusted scores				
Current femininity	4.39	4.80	0.62	.11
Current masculinity	1.60	2.60	3.71*	.26
Ideal femininity	6.07	5.04	5.32*	.32
Ideal masculinity	1.50	2.00	1.90	.18

Note. The means are adjusted for the covariates. Standard deviations are in parentheses and are given for raw scores only.
*$p < .05$.

than do those in father-present homes. In fact, the effect size difference in masculinity between father-absent boys and father-absent girls (i.e., $r = .39$) is about the same effect size difference as that between father-absent and father-present boys (i.e., $r = .35$).

We then examined the discrepancies between current and ideal masculinity and femininity for each gender. Paired sample t-tests showed that both groups of boys did not want to be significantly more or less masculine than they thought they were, $t(49) = -1.8$, $p = .09$, or significantly more or less feminine, $t(49) = 1.5, p = .13$, than they thought they were. The same analyses were conducted for girls. Both groups of girls wanted to be more feminine than they perceived themselves to be, $t(55) = -3.5$, $p = .001$. However, another surprising result was that father-absent girls wanted to be significantly less masculine than they perceived themselves to be, $t(26) = 2.1, p = .04$, whereas father-present girls did not want any change in masculinity, $t(28) = 0, p = 1$. Therefore, there was a significantly greater difference between father-absent girls' current and ideal masculinity than between father-present girls' difference, $r(54) = .26, p = .05$.

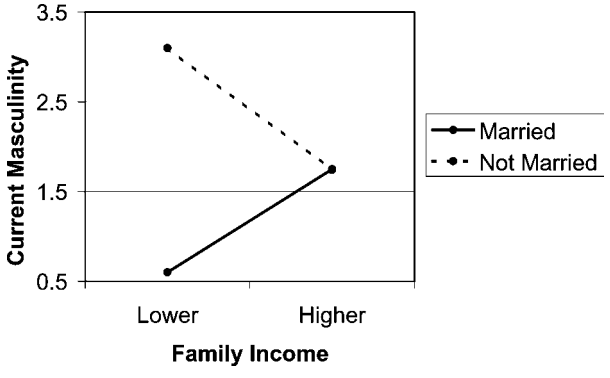

Fig. 2. Effects of family structure and family income on girls' current masculinity.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, we assessed the influence of father's absence, family functioning, family income, and self-esteem on African American adolescents' perceptions of their current and ideal masculinity and femininity. The predictions of the balance theory discussed in the introduction were also tested. The theory argues that African American mothers are more controlling and achievement-oriented with their daughters, whereas African American fathers are more controlling and achievement-oriented with their sons. Several hypotheses regarding African American adolescents' gender role development were derived from this basic idea.

The first hypothesis was that boys in father-present homes would have higher current and ideal perceptions of their masculinity and lower levels of current and ideal femininity than would father-absent boys. Results partially supported this prediction. Even after adolescents' self-esteem, family income, and three dimensions of family functioning were controlled, father-present boys had higher levels of current masculinity than did father-absent boys. These results corroborated those of most of the previous studies in this area with European

American boys, even though we did not use standardized measures of masculinity and femininity. However, after we controlled for the other variables, the boys no longer differed on ideal masculinity. Therefore, father-absent boys perceived themselves to be lower in masculinity, but they wanted to be as masculine as the father-present boys wanted to be. Counter to the prediction and to previous researchers' use of standardized measures (Kodandaram, 1991), the boys did not significantly differ on current or ideal femininity (although the trends were in that direction). Both groups tended to perceive themselves as low in femininity, and they did not want to be more or less feminine.

These findings have many implications for future research. For one, our findings show that the average African American boy from a father-absent home has a different perception of his masculinity than does the average father-present African American boy. Because income, self-esteem, important family functioning factors, or the everyday presence of their mothers cannot fully explain this result, this difference is most likely due to some remaining difference between the two groups. The everyday presence of fathers in the lives of the two-parent boys is the most likely factor. This implies that there is something unique about fathers' everyday presence in the lives of their sons that cannot be accounted for by income or by general family functioning. In fact, lower income boys have higher perceptions of masculinity than do higher income boys, even though father-present families have much higher total incomes. Furthermore, family functioning had no effect on boys' perceptions of their masculinity.

Although it is still possible that the socialization differences between single and married mothers are the main cause of the gender role differences, this is still probably due to single mothers' attempts to compensate for the lack of everyday socialization from fathers. Therefore, it could still be the lack of everyday socialization from fathers for the father-absent boys that influences the differences between the boys. Future researchers need to examine this differential socialization in more detail.

The differences that remained in current masculinity after the controls may also be accounted for by previous findings that indicate that father-present boys might actually be physically more mature than father-absent boys (Beaty, 1995). Thus, when many single African American mothers "love" their sons by attempting to protect them from perceived environmental dangers (Cunningham, Swanson, Spencer, & Dupree, 2003), they may inadvertently prevent them from physically maturing at the same rate as father-present boys. In fact, Cunningham et al. (2003) found that parental monitoring was higher for physically less mature African American boys than for more physically advanced boys of the same age. Those boys who had high parental monitoring also experienced fewer stressful events associated with high-risk neighborhoods. These stressful events may cause the boys' bodies to respond by developing faster, or fewer stressful events may cause slower physical maturity. Either way, if there are actual physical differences between the boys, they will undoubtedly impact boys' perceptions of their masculinity.

Because the traditional socialization strategies of fathers facilitate a more physically demanding environment for boys, the extra years of receiving this type of socialization everyday (e.g., rough and tumble play, pushing to achieve, making boys work through pain) may have slowly increased the physical differences between the boys. The finding that father-present boys from lower income homes had the highest perceptions of their own masculinity further supports this idea. Given that lower income boys probably live in more physically demanding environments than do higher income boys on average, it makes sense that boys who have their fathers pushing them and a physically demanding environment forcing them to mature quickly would have higher perceptions of their masculinity than would other boys their age. Given this theory, it makes sense that the higher income father-absent boys would consider themselves to be the least masculine, because they neither have their fathers pushing them, nor do they live in physically demanding environments. Therefore, the differences in masculinity the boys perceive may be due more to physical differences that have developed because of different environments than to differences in definitions of masculinity.

The next set of hypotheses stated that father-absent girls would have lower current and ideal perceptions of their femininity. Given previous research in this area, we expected both groups of girls to perceive similarly low levels of current and ideal masculinity. The results were somewhat different than the hypotheses. Even though the girls did not differ in their perceptions of current levels of femininity, they both wanted to be more feminine. However, the father-present girls wanted to be more feminine than the father-absent girls wanted to be. This is probably due to fathers' tendency to feminize

their daughters by rewarding behavior they deem to be feminine (Leve & Fagot, 1997; Parke, 1996).

The most unexpected finding was that father-absent girls from lower income families had higher perceptions of their current masculinity than did father-present girls or higher income father-absent girls. This is interesting because previous researchers have found that, although father-absent adolescent girls tend to be less feminine (Stevenson & Black, 1988), they are not necessarily more masculine. However, in retrospect, this finding could be predicted by the balance theory as well, because lower income father-absent girls are similar to lower income father-present boys. They both are pushed to be independent and accept many responsibilities (e.g., baby-sit younger siblings, cook, clean), and they both live in poorer neighborhoods that likely facilitate physical maturity. Consequently, girls in this situation would tend to be assertive, confident, self-reliant, and acquire many other traits traditionally associated with masculinity. Furthermore, because their brothers (i.e., poor father-absent boys) are not as masculine as some other boys, and because their brothers are likely to be their main models of masculinity, these girls may think of themselves as more masculine than father-present girls do because they think of themselves as being just as capable as the boys their age of doing many traditionally masculine activities.

Another related possibility is that lower income father-absent girls are physically more mature than father-present girls, and they perceive this physical maturity as masculinity. This may explain the finding that father-absent girls experience menarche at younger ages and are more sexually precocious than father-present girls (Belsky, Steinberg, & Draper, 1991; Ellis et al., 2003). Furthermore, when fathers are present in the home, girls are less likely to have to do many of the manual labor chores and take on many of the other traditionally masculine duties that they would have to do if a father were not present (Hilton & Haldeman, 1991). Therefore, it is likely that both male and female bodies respond to the physical demands of the environment in which they grow. Because, according to the balance theory, father-absent girls, especially those from lower-income backgrounds, have more physical and psychological demands placed on them, it makes sense that they would be physically more mature than girls of the same age who have experienced fewer physical demands.

The finding that father-absent girls perceive themselves as more masculine than do father-present girls is also interesting because the groups of girls did not differ on their perceptions of ideal masculinity. In fact, father-absent girls were the only group in the study who wanted to be significantly less masculine than they perceived themselves to be. Thus, father-absent girls, especially those from lower-income backgrounds, perceived themselves to be more masculine than did father-present girls, but they did not want to be so. This implies unhappiness with traits considered more masculine than those of the traditional stereotype of adolescent girls.

This unhappiness may be best understood by considering the reality of the stereotypic portrayal of single African American women as overly independent and assertive (Fordham, 1993). Instead of perceiving these traits as positive and adaptive, as studies have shown them to be (Burnett et al., 1995; Whitley, 1985), society has labeled them as atypical and problematic for women. Thus, it is not surprising that some girls are unhappy with traits society deems to be masculine and desire to be more of what society considers to be feminine.

The next hypothesis tested was that adolescents in father-present homes would have more traditional gender role development than would father-absent adolescents. This was fully supported. Within father-present and father-absent homes, girls and boys had very different gender role development. However, there was a larger discrepancy between girls and boys in father-present homes. Father-absent girls and boys tended to have less traditional gender role development than did father-present adolescents. One surprising finding was that father-absent boys were as different from father-present boys on perceptions of current masculinity as they were from father-absent girls. In fact, the lower income father-absent girls in this sample have virtually the same self-perceived masculinity scores as do the father-absent higher income boys. Therefore, in some ways, father-absent boys were as similar in gender role development to father-absent girls as they were to father-present boys.

The recent literature lends support to these findings. A meta-analysis has shown that women's masculinity scores on the Bem Sex Role Inventory and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire have increased at a very high rate since the early 1970s (r's = .74 and .43 respectively; Twenge, 1997). The masculinity scores of men have also increased, but not to the same degree. Consequently, the size of the difference between men's and women's masculinity scores has decreased. This finding roughly parallels

the significant increase in divorce and single women-headed homes in America over the same period of time (Fields, 2003). Other anecdotal evidence also lends support to this notion. For instance, the finding that African American women are on average more likely to be masculine or androgynous than are European American women (Binion, 1990; De Leon, 1993; Harris, 1996) may be due to the fact that more African American women than European American women were raised in father-absent homes.

Limitations

As with all social and behavioral science research, limitations of the current study warrant discussion. First, the correlational nature of the study–prevents our ability to make causal conclusions. It is unlikely that future researchers could ever eliminate this problem, but they could evaluate other possible mediating variables. One important possible mediator we could not assess is the influence of extended kin networks. It is very possible that father-absent children who spend time with their grandfathers and other male relatives have the same gender role development as those who live with both parents. According to the balance theory, this should be the case as long as the men have the same disciplinary authority as fathers do.

The relatively small sample of participants who all resided in southern California may also be a problem. It is possible that African Americans from other regions would not have the same pattern. This may be especially true for people living in communities where extended kin networks are still commonly utilized. Therefore, larger and more geographically diverse samples are needed before more definitive conclusions can be made.

A further possible problem with the current study is that we used parental marital status as the measure of family structure, and some have questioned the usefulness of such measures (Mott, 1990; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999). However, marital status has many advantages because it is the most commonly used measure, and it implies a sense of stability and father commitment to the socialization of children that other measures such as presence of men do not (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003). For instance, Johnson (2001) found that African American fathers who were romantically involved and cohabiting were significantly more likely to be involved with their children than were fathers who were not romantically involved and/or cohabitating. Those who are married are obviously more likely to be cohabitating and romantically involved than are those who are divorced or never married. However, other measures, such as access to father figures and quality of time with father, may reveal information not provided by marital status (Mott, 1990). Future researchers need to examine marital status and several other indicators of family structure.

Conclusion

Despite its limitations, several important findings emerged from our study. In general, father absence and family income are related to gender role development in both male and female African American adolescents. Father-present boys, especially those from lower-income backgrounds, perceive themselves as more masculine than do father-absent boys. Lower income father-absent girls also perceive themselves to be more masculine than do father-present girls, but they did not desire to be so masculine. We argued that this difference is primarily due to the environmental demands of poorer neighborhoods and the absence of fathers' traditional socialization strategies in father-absent homes, but these were not directly assessed in the current study. However, if fathers do indeed place more physical demands on their sons and reduce the physical demands placed on their daughters, as many studies have indicated (Hilton & Haldeman, 1991; Wilson et al., 1992), then this is likely one of the mechanisms by which fathers' absence impacts gender role development. If this is the case, then the lack of everyday socialization from fathers will place father-absent boys at-risk for not developing traits such as independence and assertiveness. Although many lower income father-absent girls will develop these traits, the negative emotional toll of not having a close relationship with their fathers (Amato, 1991; Mandara & Murray, 2000) and their tendency to seek out the loving they missed from their fathers in babies and other men (Belsky et al., 1991; Ellis et al., 2003) must not be discounted. Therefore, researchers and social service providers must impress upon single and married African American mothers and fathers the necessity of both raising and loving both their boys and girls.

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